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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KYIV 000522

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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: YUSHCHENKO CONFIRMS COALITION UNITY,
SUPPORT FOR PM ROLE ON MAP

Classified By: Ambassador for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary. The Ambassador and President Yushchenko met late March 11 to discuss Ukraine's bid for a NATO MAP at the April 2-4 Bucharest Summit. The Ambassador told President Yushchenko that President Bush was talking to NATO Allies about MAP for Ukraine and that the U.S. believes that unity within the Ukrainian government is essential to making the case stronger in convincing holdouts that Ukraine was ready for MAP and that Prime Minister Tymoshenko needed to be on message and openly supportive of MAP in conversations with German Chancellor Merkel, French President Sarkozy, and NATO Secretary-General de Hoop Scheffer. Yushchenko said that he

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felt he had an understanding with Sarkozy, but would work hard to get meetings with Merkel for both Tymoshenko and himself, and asked for U.S. assistance in gaining the German Chancellor's agreement to a meeting. Yushchenko said that he did not want to contemplate a plan B -- failure at Bucharest would come at a high cost for himself and for Ukraine's national security. In terms of the coalition's unity, he said that Tymoshenko complicated relations by continuing to spout what he called "election rhetoric and populism," but that he understands that some NATO allies use disunity in Kyiv as an excuse to oppose MAP for Ukraine and emphasized that there was no alternative to the current coalition. Yushchenko added that the coalition would face some difficulties in the near term, because two of its MPs were in the hospital in serious condition. He thought that it would be difficult to pass sensitive legislation, like the budget amendments, but that the coalition would negotiate with Regions and the Lytvyn Bloc on a case-by-case basis for their support.

¶2. (C) Comment. Yushchenko clearly took on board the message on political unity at home and the importance of Tymoshenko going to Berlin, Paris and Brussels, and he expressed full support for all three meetings. It was also clear that although frustrated with Tymoshenko as a coalition partner, he was committed to keeping the coalition intact. Moreover, when he talked about the importance of NATO for Ukraine's security and place in the world, it was clear how highly he values this relationship with the alliance and with the West.
End summary and comment.

Ambassador: Team Needs to be Focused and United

¶3. (C) The Ambassador began by informing President Yushchenko that President Bush had been working hard, talking to his NATO ally colleagues about MAP for Ukraine. The USG would be disappointed if the coalition fell while we are making these efforts. In the USG's view, in order to convince reluctant leaders like France and Germany that

Ukraine was ready for MAP, the West must see that there is unity within the Ukrainian Government. Finally, Tymoshenko needed to be on message and openly supportive of MAP in meetings with German Chancellor Merkel, French President Sarkozy, and NATO Secretary-General de Hoop Scheffer. The Ambassador also asked whether Yushchenko had really agreed to a plan B for Bucharest in his meeting with Sarkozy -- as the French FM reported at the NATO ministerial last week -- and whether Yushchenko wanted such a back-up plan.

Yushchenko on Reaching Out to Foreign Leaders

¶4. (C) According to Yushchenko, during his meeting with Sarkozy, the French President had told him that France would utilize all French resources on MAP, and would not waste any resources on other issues (i.e. plan B). Yushchenko said Sarkozy made this point several times. He believed that he had a firm agreement with Sarkozy -- he could call the French President at any time and would now follow up with a telegram.

¶5. (C) Yushchenko said he had met with German FM Steinmeier in early February. Steinmeier had warned Yushchenko not to take seriously the support of any country that said it favored MAP for Ukraine until after Kosovo declared its independence on February 17. Depending on the outcome of that event, NATO might postpone the Ukrainian question. Yushchenko said that Steinmeier's answers were vague and that he avoided committing to a specific German position. Therefore, a meeting with Merkel was very important. Presidential foreign policy adviser Oleksandr Chaliy added that Merkel seemed to be avoiding contact with Yushchenko -- it was very hard to get her to agree to a meeting. Yushchenko asked the U.S. to help arrange a meeting for him with Merkel.

¶6. (C) Both Yushchenko and Chaliy were concerned that it

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would be hard to get Tymoshenko to meet with the three leaders named by the Ambassador. (Note: We believe she is ready to meet them. End note.) Yushchenko suggested that he and the Prime Minister sign a joint letter to Merkel, Sarkozy, and de Hoop Scheffer. The Ambassador suggested that personal contact would be better. Yushchenko agreed that he would meet with Tymoshenko on March 12 to stress the importance of her having the three meetings. (Note. DPM Nemyria told us that Tymoshenko had a phone call already scheduled with de Hoop Scheffer for the afternoon of March ¶12. End note.) Yushchenko also said that he would see Merkel in Brussels at the European People's Party conference on March 13 and at that time would ask the Chancellor to meet with Tymoshenko.

No Plan B for Bucharest

¶7. (C) Yushchenko said that he did not want to develop a plan B or a strategy for what to do if the NATO allies did not offer Ukraine MAP in April. It had cost him a lot just to request MAP; he did not want to think about failure. In addition, he did not see any good alternatives to MAP. He noted that the Russian mass media was playing up Merkel's comments in Moscow opposing NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. Yushchenko concluded that he would stay optimistic -- that they could get their homework done and get Tymoshenko to the meetings she needed to have. Five times, Ukraine had declared its independence throughout its history, but Ukraine had never had international guarantees or recognition and each time it had been overrun by another country. NATO would bring long-term security to Ukraine -- it was a national and personal priority.

¶8. (C) Yushchenko said he thought there was more political unity on MAP than it seemed from the outside. Several weeks prior, he had met with opposition leader Yanukovych and Speaker Yatsenyuk. He had pointed out that in the book Yanukovych had published in 2004 about Ukraine's strategy through 2015, Yanukovych had written that Ukraine should get MAP in 2006 and join NATO in 2008. The personal circumstances of the players had changed, but the strategic policy had not. Yushchenko reminded Yanukovych that he had not come out opposed to his own 2004 book or recalled his signature from the 2003 law on the fundamentals of national security; a law, Yushchenko added, that had been passed by a wide number of political forces. So Regions had not really changed its position on NATO, it was just using MAP to play to its electorate. Tymoshenko was doing the same. Yushchenko criticized both leaders for not holding an internal debate about how their actions affected Ukraine's national security.

The Coalition is Strained, but Will Stay Together

¶9. (C) The problem with Tymoshenko, Yushchenko said, is that she was still spouting election rhetoric, making it hard to work with her. Yushchenko said he would be frank -- the current coalition was painful for him, but he saw no alternatives. When asked about rumors that his chief of staff, Viktor Baloha, was planning to disable the current coalition, Yushchenko said that he had not authorized anyone to try to reformat the coalition. He added that whether the coalition could even muster 226 votes was now in doubt. There were two MPs in the hospital in serious condition. (Note. One is OU-PSD MP Spidorenko, who has been in and out of intensive care with heart problems since the fall. Yushchenko could not remember the second MP's name. Interestingly, Yushchenko was clearly not considering OU-PSD Plyushch as a possible vote -- although he did not sign the coalition agreement, Plyushch holds an OU-PSD seat and could still vote with the majority, giving them 226 votes. End note.)

¶10. (C) It was important, Yushchenko said, not to let others doubt that they have 226. Therefore, the coalition should conduct negotiations with Regions and Lytvyn Bloc to reach tactical agreements on certain legislation, but never let them suspect there were not already 226 MPs on board. Yushchenko's only demand was that the coalition negotiate together, that there be no secret or parallel negotiations. This situation, he warned, meant that adopting sensitive laws -- such as the budget amendments and the 12 laws in the coalition agreement -- would be complicated, and some might not get passed at all. This was just the reality Ukraine faced at this time.

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¶11. (C) The election-oriented behavior of the Prime Minister, Yushchenko said, moved the coalition in a negative direction. Tymoshenko was not against the coalition, she merely put her self-interest first. This was where the problems with MAP cropped up (presumably because being overly pro-NATO could hurt Tymoshenko in campaigning in the East during the next presidential election.) The Presidential Secretariat had worked hard to create the right circumstances for her to back MAP, but she had agreed to them -- they just had to engage her a lot on the issue. Yushchenko said that in general, Tymoshenko challenged his authority 20 times day, but he only responded once. Nevertheless, he would keep this coalition.

¶12. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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